



What Can the Fox Say?

Objectives: Students will be able to demonstrate specific biological features of the Red Fox, including physical characteristics, habitat, and behavior. Student will interpret the predatorial techniques of foxes as well as dramatize them. Students will hypothesis why the Red Fox's behavior has been adapted to it's environment.

Notes: A fox can be a term used to describe almost 30 species of omnivorous canids. A Red Fox is the most common of the fox family, and has the widest range of any terrestrial carnivore. The Cascade Red Fox, specifically, is the smallest of all the Red Foxes, and represents unique genetic diversity. To survive, the Cascade Red Fox has adapted and become a **successful predator in it's unique environment**. Two of the special adaptations deal with the Cascade Red Foxes communication and movement. Foxes do not communicate in a chorus like wolves or coyotes do. They communicate with body language, scent, marking food and territorial boundary lines with urine and feces, but most importantly communicate a variety of vocalizations. The noises can be divided into two different groups; contact sounds for communicating over long distances and interaction sounds used in close quarters. Recent studies theorize the Cascade red fox have 12 adult and 8 kit vocalizations, but the most well known are four distinct calls. The way the fox walks is not only highly profitable for this predator but also humans, and is studied by wilderness survival experts and members of the military. It causes less strain on the body and creates less damage and leaves less evidence on pathways.

Communication: Four most common calls

- ❖ **"Wow-wow-wow"**
 - The most well-known vulpine noise is a sort of barking that spans three to five syllables. "Conversations" made up of these noises often occur between widely spaced foxes. As their distance decreases, the sound becomes quieter. A pup is greeted with the quietest version of this sound.
- ❖ The alarm bark
 - This monosyllabic sound is made by an adult to warn cubs of danger. From far away it sounds like a sharp bark, but at closer range it resembles a muffled cough, like a football rattle or a stick along a picket fence.
- ❖ Gekkering
 - This is a stuttering, throaty noise made at aggressive encounters. It is most frequently heard in the courting season, or when kits are at play.
- ❖ The vixen's wail
 - This is a long, drawn-out, mono-syllabic, and rather eerie wail most commonly made during the breeding season. It was thought that only the vixen made this sound, summoning males, but it has been shown to also be made by the males, evidently serving other purposes as well.

Fox-Walk Technique: "Slowly is silently"

- ❖ Footwear
 - Barefoot may sweat and stick to surfaces, large shoes, and rigid materials make a great deal of noise.
- ❖ Clothing
 - Loose is clutter; in the dark, dark blues and grays are best for blending.
- ❖ Bio-Functions
 - Breath through mouth; press index finger to upper lip to prevent sneezing.
- ❖ Obstacles
 - Always try to avoid if possible, if not, remain in close contact with the ground to prevent accidental falls.
- ❖ Speed
 - At least 1/4th normal pace, each step between 15 and 30 seconds.
- ❖ Basic Points

- Center of gravity is hips; use wide-angle vision to keep balance, where everything in periphery is in equal focus; find natural stride length and shorten it; never plant a foot, conform to landscape; leave mental distractions behind; total sensory awareness.

Materials: an open area, blindfold, token

Procedure:

- Begin by introducing the fox. Ask the students what they remember about the Cascade Red Fox. Lead a discussion regarding how unique the Cascade Red Fox is, and explain that the activity they will do is going to focus on how the fox move, since they are regarded as some of the best silent, stealthy predators.
- When ready to perform the fox walk, be sure you are in an open area free of obstacles. Remind students that proper stalking techniques should be learned and utilized for observing wildlife.
 - Have students line up facing the instructor. Students should mirror each movement as it is demonstrated.
 - Look straight ahead, never look at your feet. Focus on a single, stationary object for balance.
 - Slowly lift one foot straight up to about knee level.
 - Point toes outward and slowly lower to the ground in front of hips.
 - Allow outside of toes to touch surface lightly keeping all weight over the foot that is planted on the ground.
 - Roll all toes onto the ground, testing for footing and any potentially noisy debris.
 - Allow whole foot to rest on ground surface, still staying centered over stationary foot.
 - Slowly shift weight onto the front foot.
 - Repeat sequence with each step. A single step should take no less than 15 seconds to complete. Have students count aloud for the first several attempts to get an idea of how slow a motion it is. Remind them that it is incorrect to place toes on ground in front, count to 15 then step. The motion should be fluid and gradual.
 - After several practice attempts over a distance, choose one student to sit blindfolded with a token resting on the ground in front of them. They are not allowed to touch the object or to see with their eyes in any way. This is the hound.
 - All other students should move to a solitary location at least 25 feet away. They are all foxes and they are hiding in their dens.
 - Each fox must stalk successfully using the fox-walk technique up to the token, touch the token and return to their den without getting caught.
 - A fox is caught when the hound hears them, points to them and freezes them. A foxen fox must sit silently in the spot they are caught until the round is over. Instructor should stand near fox and act as an official caller.
 - The activity should be repeated so that each student gets the opportunity to be the hound. Pick students who have successfully stalked first. The goal is not to be the first or fastest to get the token and at no time should a fox touch the token.

Extensions:

- 1) An additional option activity would be to play fox and squirrel, similar to elbow tag, where one person is a fox, one person is a squirrel and they are surrounded by a circle of partner sets who are trees. A squirrel must get to a tree, link elbows with one of the partners before the fox tags them. If they do, the partner they are not linked with becomes the squirrel. If the squirrel is tagged, they become the fox and the fox becomes the squirrel and must run.

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